



Sarah Michelle Gellar

She's scared of graveyards and has fears about being kidnapped by *Spiderman*, but she's still the hardest Vampire Slayer on DVD

WORDS: DECLAN KENNEDY

Have you ever watched an episode of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and found yourself wondering just what the hell the Scooby gang are gabbling on about? Well, worry no more, because you're in good company. What you might find surprising is that you share your uncool problem with Sarah Michelle Gellar, The Slayer herself. "In the first episode," she admits, "I had to come in and yell, 'What's the sitch?' I didn't know what 'sitch' meant. I still have to ask [Buffy creator and executive producer] Joss Whedon, 'What does this mean?' because I don't speak the lingo. I think he makes it up half the time."

The 'sitch' at the moment, as *Buffy* fans will know, is that their indestructible heroine has been, well, destroyed. Actually, she destroyed herself in the finale of the last season that saw her meet her evil match in the form of flamboyantly violent goddess, Glory. But that is now, and Season Three - out on DVD on November 14 - is way back then, when Buffy merely had to contend with a snippy headmaster, corrupt mayor, choosing what to wear to the prom and getting her homework in on time.

While *Buffy* may not have a great deal of fun in the classroom, the actress behind her has an entirely different view. "I had an amazing, amazing time at high school," she says. "I went to a high school that wasn't about conformity. It really stressed being an individual, and personal freedom."

Before that, though, Gellar had a hard time as a child actress at junior high. "I think 'tortured' would be the right word," she says. "I didn't have any friends in junior high school because I was different. I left for six months to do a Neil Simon show and when I got back, I just thought everything would go back to the way it was. But everyone said, 'Well, you left for six months - you think you're gonna come back and we're just gonna be your friends again?' I had two friends in junior high, that was it."

Buffy has ensured that Gellar need never be friendless again, as its popularity spread worldwide. At the core of its success is the whole world of the undead that The Slayer has been called to fight, and a creepy lot of monsters it is, too. "I think what makes *Buffy* so real is how much effort we put into it and how much we believe in it," Gellar explains. "When I'm standing on the set and a monster is coming at me, it's as real as anything can be at that moment. When I go home, I'm a little shaky and have a lot of nightmares."

The Slayer? Nightmares? "When I was younger," she says, "I used to have this fear that a kidnapper was going to climb up to my twelfth storey window using suction cups, like *Spiderman*, and kidnap me." Uh-huh. Whatever. "And I have an irrational fear of cemeteries and being buried alive." Errr... irrational?

This must have made it hard to get through the filming of *Nightmares*, the episode in Season One where Buffy is, well, buried alive in a cemetery. "I told the producer I couldn't do it," she says. "But

through miscommunication, the message never got relayed. It came to four in the morning on the day of filming, and they basically made me do it. I was hysterical. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done for my job. Afterwards, I cried all the way home. It was horrible! It's really hard to be a Vampire Slayer if you're scared of cemeteries ..."

Lucky, then, that Gellar doesn't spend her whole time on stakeouts. She's soon to be seen as the rather less proactive Daphne in the movie version of *Scooby Doo* (starring new husband Freddie Prinze Jr and filmed at the Gold Coast's Warner Studios) and already has silver screen credits in *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *Scream 2* and *Cruel Intentions*, in which she shone as a delightfully wicked teenage *femme fatale*.

"*Cruel Intentions* was a rare script to find," she says,

"I have an irrational fear of cemeteries and being buried alive"

explaining that it gets annoying sometimes that she only ever seems to be sent scripts for horror movies. "But let's be honest, I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for *Buffy*, and I remember that every day."

But there must be something about doing the films that she enjoys more? "Time," she states, simply. "Time is the greatest gift of film. We have such an incredibly quick schedule on the television show. We shoot one episode every eight days, with usually one or two extra days of second unit filming - and we have to fit major computer graphics and stunt work within that schedule as well. A lot of the time your emotional scenes can get lost in the shuffle because you're so busy trying to get the big fight scenes done."

"But when you're doing film," she continues, "you have that time. Even though *Cruel Intentions* was done on a pretty quick schedule, we still had time to do take after take. And there's also the rehearsal factor. On the television show, if we rehearse a scene more than twice, that's a big deal." So, does Gellar have a preference? "Television and film are so different, I don't think you can compare them. In the movies, you have a character and you tell their story - beginning, middle and end. On the television, I'm able to broaden the character; I feel that I've experienced Buffy's life for the past three years. I take it very personally"

Oh, and "sitch"? It's short for situation, of course. Duh! ■

Season Three of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* will be reviewed in the next issue of *What DVD*.

